

Case Study: Frontier Co-Op

“Sarah cut right to the core of our current practices, and designed new systems to help us improve immediately.”

- Tony Bedard, CEO

THE CHALLENGE

When [Frontier Co-Op](#) approached Sarah Nolet of AgThentic to improve their operational sustainability strategy, Seth Petchers, Sustainable Supply Chain Manager, saw two key challenges facing the member-owned cooperative. How would they:

- 1. Improve sustainability reporting by updating data collection systems*
- 2. Use data to identify and implement high-value, yet practical, sustainability initiatives*

As a leading manufacturer and distributor of natural products such as herbs, spices, and teas, Frontier’s commitment to sustainability is integral to their success. However, Frontier had fallen into a habit of only collecting sustainability data once a year for the annual report, and as a result, sustainability could not drive decisions and operational improvements in real-time. Frontier needed to identify issues with the current data collection systems, define and implement new, easy-to-manage systems, and create a prioritization framework to allow senior management to make informed decisions about sustainability goals and initiatives.

THE AGTHENTIC APPROACH

Become part of the team

Sarah immediately embedded herself within the Frontier team to understand the core issues with the cooperative’s current data collection and reporting systems. Sarah worked closely with each of Frontier’s

departments to understand their role in sustainability data collection and reporting. Through interviews with key stakeholders from each unit within Frontier, she uncovered existing mental models and organisational dynamics within the firm that were affecting high-level strategic decision-making processes. For example, it became clear that Frontier’s hesitation to prioritize new sustainability initiatives stemmed from a lack of trust in the data collection processes. The lack of trust, in turn, came from the combination of missing incentives and accountability, and processes that were cumbersome and inaccurate. Frontier needed a robust and reliable system that employees and decision makers across the cooperative could confidently embrace.

Benchmark

In parallel, Sarah undertook a benchmarking exercise to identify best practices in sustainability and marketing across Frontier’s competitors and sustainability leaders in related industries. A key finding was that there are industry-wide inconsistencies in how sustainability initiatives are reported and measured. Though specific initiatives-like a % reduction in carbon- are not always transferable across companies, all industry leaders develop specific, measurable, and actionable goals, and create processes to ensure they are accountable for the targets they set.

It was unrealistic for Frontier to make decisions based on what their peers were doing; however, it was critical that Frontier adopt the practices of goal setting and accountability. Sarah needed to find a new solution that would prevent Frontier’s senior leadership from letting “perfect” be the enemy of “progress”.

Broaden The System Boundary

To create a system that frequently generated accurate data without adding unnecessary or burdensome processes, Sarah worked closely with external parties, such as waste management and packaging vendors. In many cases, these vendors were already collecting data that Frontier could use. Sarah reduced the resources Frontier needed to spend to capture insights, while maintaining accuracy.

Prototype & Iteratively Improve

Sarah created a prototype data collection system for Frontier and new processes to ensure data reliability, such as integrating sustainability data into existing systems that were already frequently updated and checked. Sarah they tested the prototype with relevant departments, and iteratively made improvements to ensure the tool and processes would be utilized and trusted, as well as enable management to confidently set sustainability goals.

“Now, we spit out the packaging data promptly on the first day of each month and we’ve got it formatted to it plug right into our spreadsheet, making the two day process into a 5 minute affair.”

– Seth Petchers

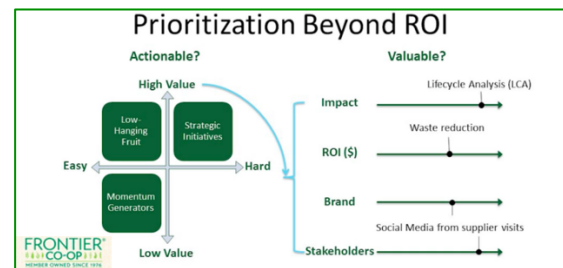
Turn Data into Decisions

After working with stakeholders throughout Frontier to get buy-in from the people responsible for regularly collecting the data, Sarah helped the senior management easily use this data to drive decisions about which initiatives to take on and how to set challenging, meaningful, and realistic goals.

Sarah developed a simple prioritization framework based on both ease of

implementation as well as strategic and financial value to Frontier.

The senior leadership team, after agreeing to implement Sarah’s prototype system and committing to regularly incorporate sustainability data into management decisions, asked Sarah to repeat the presentation across multiple departments to build confidence in the new system and awareness of the updated approach to sustainability reporting and goal setting.



IMPACT

“The truth is that the work we did last year is proving to be really valuable. We’re doing LED conversion in Urbana and Norway this year and it was really easy to figure out what the impact would be on FY 16’s usage data.”

–Seth Petchers

By simplifying metrics and data collection processes, identifying opportunities for improvement, and creating accountability, Sarah helped Frontier define their future strategic direction and identify near-term actionable initiatives.

For Frontier’s employees, customers, and members, the updated sustainability systems help instil confidence that the Co-op remains as dedicated as ever to being a leader in sustainability.